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*Aristophane et les partis à Athènes.* Par MAURICE CROISSET.

Paris: Fontemoing, 1906. Pp. xi + 311. F. 3.50.

Auguste Couat in his brilliant study, *Aristophane et l'ancienne comédie attique* (3. éd. 1902), maintains that not only Aristophanes, but the whole body of poets of the Old Comedy, were clients of an oligarchical faction at Athens, and that their plays, instead of being an independent criticism of contemporary life and politics, were merely a vehicle for exploiting partisan views and a means of effecting partisan ends. It is singular that Couat's keen appreciation of the elusive quality of Aristophanes' genius (cf. pp. 386 ff.) did not lead him to distrust so extreme a conclusion. M. Croiset, who had already expressed his dissent from Couat's views in the *Histoire de la littérature grecque* (Vol. III, p. 460), here brings together the results of his own investigation of this important question. The passage of time has only strengthened his earlier impression, and he finds little to retract. One feels, perhaps, that he is disposed to take the poet a little more seriously than he did in the earlier work—but his seriousness is never the seriousness of Kock.

The introduction contains a brief survey of the origins of comedy, the facts of Aristophanes' early life, and a summary of the political situation at the time of his début as a comic poet. The rest of the volume is devoted to an analysis of the extant plays and fragments. M. Croiset examines the circumstances under which each play was produced; the poet's purpose in writing it, so far as it can be determined, and his general attitude toward men and things, as shown in remarks by the way. He compares the poet's attitude as it appears from this analysis with the traditional attitude of the oligarchical party, of whose views he believes *Respublica Atheniensium* [Xen.] to be a typical expression; and he shows beyond question that, whatever temporary alliances Aristophanes may have made, he was *nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*, and that, however clearly he may have recognized the besetting sins of the Athenian democracy, he is nowhere at enmity with the democratic principle.

The author's treatment of disputed questions is in such admirable temper that one hesitates to take issue with him in matters of detail. Yet I can hardly agree with him in regarding comedy as the mouthpiece merely of the rural population (p. 11) any more than with Couat, that it was the "porte-parole" of the oligarchs. The humor of Aristophanes refuses to don a party emblem. Indeed, M. Croiset himself notes that in the *Acharnians* the rustics are exploited for the amusement of the city-folk (p. 88). If it is true that the countryman at the festival loved to see his city-brethren caricatured, it is none the less true that one's enjoyment of a caricature is in exact proportion to his acquaintance with the subject of it; and nobody enjoyed more than the city-folk seeing their neighbors in the pillory, even if few had the urbanity of Socrates, who could see the

fun in jokes at his own expense. The Old Comedy, like its modern descendant, political caricature, busied itself with men and issues in the public eye. And these were naturally city-men and city-customs.

Still less convincing is M. Croiset's suggestion that Aristophanes was a country boy (pp. 14 ff.). The poet's minute knowledge of country ways and country things, his vivid and sympathetic presentation of country life, are by no means necessarily the outgrowth of personal experience. It is that very apprehension and realization of feelings and situations beyond the range of personal experience that distinguishes the supreme artist, and is so large an element in the quality we call inspiration.

On the vexed question of Aristophanes' citizenship M. Croiset does not speak with assurance (pp. 14 ff.). He rightly concludes that the poet actually enjoyed the privileges of citizenship (pp. 14, 148), both at his début and thereafter, but the specter of Cleon's supposed *γραφὴ ξενίας* seems to trouble him; and the compromise between Cleon and the poet (by which the *γραφὴ* was never brought to trial) which he is led to assume on the evidence of *Vespae* 1284-91 (pp. 145 ff.) seems to him to argue a weakness in Aristophanes' claims. The argument is ingenious—and yet the whole story of the *γραφὴ ξενίας* rests on too slender evidence to be taken quite so seriously. The passage in the *Vespae*, as Starkie remarks, implies rather a brawl—what Professor Gildersleeve calls a “back-yard quarrel”—than a formal lawsuit; and if we are placing dependence on the scholia, we are confronted not only by the confusion which M. Croiset notes of the *γραφὴ ξενίας* with the indictment before the Council, but by three alleged suits, all brought to trial, and all, as we are told, resulting in the poet's vindication (*Vita* Dübner xi; cf. xii). Those charges of base origin which the comic poets flung back and forth have never been better appraised than Browning, who knew his scholia, appraises them in his *Aristophanes' Apology*. M. Croiset deserves our gratitude for laying to rest the theory that the most Attic of poets passed his life at Athens as an alien, especially since Van Leeuwen, of whom one expects better things, has seen fit to resurrect the charge in his recent edition of the *Vespae*. But we can hardly hope to write the history of the poet's quarrel with Cleon on the basis of the extant scholia.

The analyses of the individual plays every student of Aristophanes will wish to work through for himself. M. Croiset never forgets that he is writing of a poet and a comic poet, and in his hands nothing is hackneyed. For this reason it is the more to be regretted that the book lacks an index.

Couat in the preface to his *Aristophane et l'ancienne comédie* remarks that it is always in order for one to voice his opinions about great writers, “pourvu qu'il le fasse avec sincérité et avec quelque compétence.” There will always be room for so discriminating and suggestive a volume as M. Croiset's.